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FALL BOOK ISSUE

THE

Commonweal

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Beckett's Dying Gladiators

by Horace Gregory

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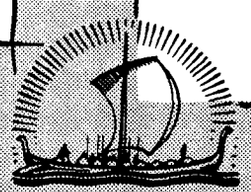

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THE
Commonweal
A Weekly Review of Public Affairs, Literature, and the Arts
THIRTY-THIRD YEAR OF PUBLICATION

week by week

FOUR YEARS LATER

POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS should, we suppose, make people acquire a new interest in politics. But the only person we know of to whom this has happened during this campaign is Dwight D. Eisenhower. Early in the game, the Democrats decided they could not hope to win unless Mr. Eisenhower were forced to abandon his favorite role as a man above partisan politics. In this decision they were probably quite correct, but we doubt that they—or the Republicans either, for that matter—ever imagined that the President would turn out to be quite as effective a campaigner as he has. Mr. Eisenhower has come off his pedestal with a vengeance, and he has for weeks been smiting Democrats hip and thigh with a growing enthusiasm.

As far as the average citizen goes, though, the intense interest that marked the 1952 campaign seems to have disappeared. The GOP is running hard on its peace and prosperity platform. But the evangelical fervor that marked the first Eisenhower campaign has largely evaporated, and this is hardly surprising; crusades, after all, have to come to a halt sometime. On the other side of the political fence, the Democrats face much the same problem. In his first campaign Adlai Stevenson was a new voice; in 1952, his vision of America aroused great enthusiasm, especially among intellectuals. This time, the same pitch of enthusiasm has not been reached; toward some who were among his more ardent admirers during the last campaign, Adlai Stevenson must this time feel like the man in the joke who was told, "Yes, yes, I know you saved my life four years ago, but what have you done for me lately?" And, short of changing his personality completely, there was no way Adlai Stevenson could have avoided this pitfall.

Both the Republican and the Democratic campaigns, then, suffer from a feeling of sameness on the part of the voters, and many political commentators have already remarked on this fact. Yet, while we see their point, the differences between the two campaigns seem to us even more significant than the similarities.

IN EMPHASIZING the difference between the last campaign and this one, we realize that we may be misjudging the extent of the change that has taken place. Richard Nixon is taking the high road, but this time he had to show himself as a responsible young man, well qualified for the Presidency if Mr. Eisenhower were unable to finish his second term. This fact, we grant, necessarily put him on his best behavior, and the present change is no guarantee of the future if he became the head of the Republican Party. We also grant that it is inaccurate to say that Senator McCarthy has mellowed; he has, in fact, simply disappeared, and as far as any campaigning is concerned, he might as well be a member of the Prohibitionist Party. But even if Mr. Nixon were the Old Richard, and Senator McCarthy were around to brandish "photostatic copies" of some irrelevancy or other on every TV network in the country, we do not think the effect this time would be the same as it was in 1952. And that difference is a measure of how far we have come and how far the national mood has changed.

Take, for example, Adlai Stevenson's remarks on ending the draft and halting tests on the H-bomb. Both of these are capable of arousing heated controversy among men of the best will in the world, and Administration spokesmen and Mr. Eisenhower himself have replied to his proposals in very strong terms. But no one, as far as we

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CANDLES, particularly tall ones on the gradines of an altar, at times seem perversely resistant to all attempts to light them. When last extinguished, wicks may have been pressed into the molten wax . . . snapped off close to their bases . . . or cocked at awkward angles. In any event, time drags and exasperation mounts as the altar boy or sacristan seeks to effect combustion with the tip of his taper lighter.

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know, has intimated that Adlai Stevenson is "soft on Communism" or that he is secretly the creature of the Communists. We do not think this would have been the story in 1952, and we should all be grateful for the difference.

An important part of the reason for this change in national mood has undoubtedly been what has happened to the Republican Party during the last four years. After twenty noisy years in opposition, it was easy enough for the Republicans in 1952 to make bitter jokes about five per centers, mink coats and the deep freezes that symbolized for many a moral let-down inevitable in a Party that had been in power for a long time. But four years have passed, and now the Republicans hear phrases that make them wince, like Dixon-Yates and "conflict of interest," and as a result they do not want to stress the corruption issue too hard.

Four years ago, it was easy enough for the out-of-power Republicans to use Dean Acheson as whipping-boy, to ignore the places where the Communists had been bested and to blame all Communist gains on "pinkos" in the State Department. But John Foster Dulles is their own man, the man who wrote the liberation plank in their 1952 platform, and writing about liberation has turned out to be far easier than bringing it about—especially for a party running on a peace platform. Korea is partitioned, half of Indochina has been lost, and the Russians have achieved a substantial penetration of the Middle East—all developments that have taken place during a GOP Administration.

From all these things, the Republicans have learned a salutary lesson. In 1952, twenty years out of power had turned the GOP onto the path of easy and essentially negative criticism, and this fact was reflected in the bitter, divisive and often tragically misleading 1952 campaign. In 1956, four years of the exercise of power have taught them that wishing will not make it so, on either foreign or domestic issues, even when those doing the wishing are one hundred per cent, simon-pure Republicans. This is a valuable lesson, one an onlooker may feel the GOP has learned the hard way, but a good lesson nonetheless.

SQUEEZE ON TANKERS

IN THE early days of the Suez crisis much hope was placed in the threat to supply Europe's oil via the Cape of Good Hope and from South America through an expanded tanker fleet. For when Colonel Nasser realized that his Canal could be by-passed, he was expected to become more tractable.

The outlook now is considerably less optimistic. It is revealed that actually the United States has very little in the way of a tanker reserve to call upon. The twenty-six vessels lying idle until very recently are quite unequal to the added shipping burden embodied in the longer haul. And a shortage of available shipyards and shipbuilding plate restricts new construction. It is estimated that Europe would have to cut its oil consumption by one-fifth without the Suez and the vulnerable "Tapline" from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean.

Meanwhile the Egyptians appear to be hanging on, with canal traffic near normal and a number of new pilots in training. Yet the Suez stands in need of costly improvements if it is to function effectively for larger vessels in the next few years. Mr. Nasser's original promise to use Suez profits to build the Dam seems increasingly visionary. The Suez is, in fact, a costly dispute all round.

RIOTS AND TRIALS

BOTH THE Poznan riots and the Poznan trials strengthen the knowledge and strong belief that there is seething discontent among the workers and peasants, not only in Poland but in the other satellites. The trials, more open and fair than any previously held in oppressed Poland, confirmed earlier statements that the rioters were not atypical of the mass of Polish workers.

Those already tried, youths of nineteen and twenty, the legitimate children of Communist Poland, themselves Communists and sons of Communists, revolted against prolonged poverty, injustice and misery. They have told their stories aloud in the courtrooms of Poland. The present regime cannot deny the conditions which led to the riots. Nor can it suppress and punish the rioters under the present desire to be lenient. Yet the regime cannot easily improve the conditions. Both leaders and people, oppressor and oppressed, are being ground in the mills of the present Communist strategy.

LITURGY AT ASSISI

THE International Congress on Pastoral Liturgy recently concluded at Assisi was, from almost every point of view, a heartening occasion.

There was, for example, the warm commendation

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given by Pope Pius XII to the leaders of the liturgical movement, who received special praise for the "balanced way" in which they have pressed forward the adaptation of the Church's worship to the ways and needs of the present without yielding any of the vital traditions of the past. The liturgical movement has encountered enough suspicion and opposition, in high places and low, to make Pope Pius' stirring encouragement doubly welcome.

At the Congress itself a number of vital liturgical questions were vitally discussed. The restoration of the ministry of the diaconate to the Latin Catholic Rite has been widely discussed in France, Germany and the mission countries. It was recommended to the Congress, however, in a report on the success of the new Holy Week ordo in the United States. The report, drawn up by the late Archbishop Edwin O'Hara and delivered by Auxiliary Bishop Leo F. Dworschak of Fargo, concluded with the following suggestion: "The Church at Prayer through the liturgy should be a witness to Christ in every village, through the restored ministry of the diaconate." This recommendation, made for the United States, was echoed for the mission countries by the Conference of Vicars Apostolic for Indonesia and China, which suggested that "the minor church functions and orders be re-established in a form adapted to modern conditions."

Another subject which received considerable discussion at Assisi was the increased use of the vernacular in parts of the Mass, the administration of the Sacraments, and the Breviary. Particularly striking were the words of Bishop William Van Bekkum, S.V.D., Vicar Apostolic of Ruteng, Indonesia, who stressed the urgency of adaptation and adoption of the "outward forms of the liturgy" in mission countries: "The mission fields are going through a period which as far as we can see is crucially decisive for the preservation and expansion of the Church. And this decisive period will be short, very short."

No account of the Congress, however, would be complete without mentioning the somber judgment of Father Ferdinando Antonelli, O.F.M., a ranking official of the Sacred Congregation of Rites. Very many Catholics, he said, have been separated so long from the true liturgical life of the Church that it will require generations of re-education to bring them back to active, genuine participation in it. Speaking of the universal Church as urgently as Bishop Van Bekkum had spoken for the mission countries, Father Antonelli stressed that "the patient work of re-education, spiritual and technical, must begin now."

As this Franciscan scholar conceives it, the task of "re-education" is all-pervasive as well as urgent: "Indeed, only when priests have a profound grasp of the theology of the Redemption, which is unfolded in the liturgy . . . will they be able to instill into the faithful that deep conviction of the inestimable value of these mysteries which arouses in each of them the desire and the will to live them again with Christ."

Father Antonelli's estimate of the time required to restore the faithful to the full and true liturgical life of the Church should make all Catholics prayerfully conscious of the past and present labors of those engaged in the liturgical movement. They have at Assisi again given evidence that they know the magnitude and necessity of making the liturgy, as it should be, both the worship of God and the school of Christian life.

A CHECK ON MERGERS

THE PRESENT PACE of the mergers of banks and other American corporations is so swift that it makes news when someone calls a halt to any such proceedings. These days men who believe that the almost irresistible trend to fewer and bigger business units is not necessarily a sound one seldom get a chance to make their point. But in our curious amalgam of business independence with municipal, state and federal regulation such things do happen.

A striking instance is the block thrown against the merger of two Buffalo, N.Y., banks by George A. Mooney, State Superintendent of Banks, on the grounds that this would result in "undue concentration of bank assets." Actually, if the plan had gone through just two banks in the major American city of Buffalo would have held ninety-eight per cent of the city's commercial banking assets. Stockholders of both merging banks had approved, and the State Attorney General had seen no obstacle in the anti-trust laws, but the State Banking Department now holds otherwise. Further considerations were the fear of encouraging the rush to more mergers of a similar character and, on the other hand, of provoking legislation that would block those bank mergers that *would* be in the public interest. It was recently proposed in Congress that decisions of this sort be vested in federal agencies, and Mr. Mooney is among those who maintain that state officials are necessarily more conversant with local conditions. In keeping the Manufacturers

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and Traders Trust Company and the Liberty Bank apart, he makes a convincing case.

ANNE FRANK IN GERMANY

THERE APPEARED in Germany at the beginning of this month a play which leaves the German audiences strangely silent but strangely moved. For each audience seems to recognize that it is somehow involved in the performance, that in this play there is for German audiences a collective role which they must play off-stage. This play, familiar by now to many Americans, is "The Diary of Anne Frank."

Anne Frank had scarcely left her childhood, was hardly embarked upon her adolescence, when she was asked to bear a large burden of adulthood. In the early forties, in the years when Jews were being hunted down in every country under Nazi control, Anne Frank and her family lived in occupied Amsterdam. Here they took uncertain refuge in a hidden annex over a little spice shop. In this secret annex, under crushing pressures from without and cramping, abrasive conditions within, Anne Frank matured. And in her diary she set down with clear, compelling honesty her discoveries, joys and disappointments, her wonder, fear, and faith. From the short time that was allotted her she distilled a full life. For the annex was finally found out, she was discovered, and she joined the millions who died because they were Jews.

When her diary was published here it made its way as the authentic statement it was. The dramatization of the diary, still on Broadway, was given the Pulitzer Prize and the N. Y. Drama Critics Award. It seemed that the experiences of Anne Frank had been transmuted into art, and that the harsh, historical circumstances in which her life took root would recede, would fade from mind, before the triumph of her spirit.

But in Europe, where productions of the play opened simultaneously in Berlin, Zurich, Vienna, Dusseldorf, Hamburg and Dresden, the audiences reacted not only to a play but to their own recent and intimate history. Anne Frank's diary had become a public comment on the wartime decimation of the Jews, the play an occasion for public recognition of Germany's responsibility. Audience reactions scarcely differ. There is no applause at the end of the play; if it starts it is soon stifled. The people leave the theater silent and bowed. From letters to the Berlin producer the New York *Times* correspondent quoted these as typical: "One can only creep home out of shame and guilt." "It will undoubtedly deeply shake anyone who comes to see it." "It was the most emotional experience I have been through in the theater."

Such reactions help to answer perennial questions about the relation between the subject matter of a work of art and the finished work, as well as the relations of both with an audience. But at this point in history the play has another importance. For today in Germany it is a document of our times; it comments searingly on the possibilities of man's inhumanity to man. Yet the reactions of the large audiences partially redeem that statement of Anne Frank's which ends the play: "In spite of all, I still believe in the good of mankind."

MINERS' PROSPECT

THE NATION'S rebounding coal industry supplies an extreme instance of the effects of the latest labor-saving machinery. There are many reasons, competition with other fuels being primarily responsible. The extent of these greater efficiencies is such that when the American soft coal miner achieves his present average of eleven tons a day, he is producing eight times as much as his counterpart in Europe.

From the viewpoint of employment there are but two alternatives when production per man-hour moves so sharply ahead. One answer is the shorter work day—say, the six-hour day which certain American labor leaders are believed to have in view before the end of the 1950's. The other is simply to cut down on the number of jobs. (A third way would be feasible only if, somehow or other, mechanization of an industry were to coincide with a great spurt in national and world economic activity resulting in unprecedented demand.)

The fact that John L. Lewis and the UMW have voted for the longer work week once again underlines the special character of the coal miners and their work. Perhaps past mining disasters and continuing dangers to life and limb have something to do with this. The numbers living on survivors' and disabled pensions would seem to create a certain tradition. In any case, despite a markedly growing demand for coal, one out of every three bituminous miners has lost his job, and most of those displaced are living on unemployment pensions. Such a set-up would hardly serve as a feasible pattern for American industry generally or as an acceptable result of automation.

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Beckett's Dying Gladiators

"HIS HEROES ARE MOCK-TRAGIC HEROES, 'DYING GLADIATORS,' YET NEVER ATTAINING RESPECT AMONG LIVING CREATURES AROUND THEM, OR A DESIRED FUNEREAL DIGNITY"

HORACE GREGORY

THE FIRST thing to be said about Samuel Beckett—and I suspect it will be the last—is that he is essentially a poet. This statement may seem illogical because the general public knows him as the author of a play, *Waiting for Godot,* written in prose, and is beginning to know him as the author of two novels, or long short stories, *Molloy* (1955) and *Malone Dies* (1956). In Beckett's case, unlike that of many others who begin a literary career by writing a slender book of poems (Beckett's was *Whoroscope,* 1930), the fact retains its importance in his later prose. It is reinforced by a second volume of verse, *Echo's Bones,* which was published in Paris by George Reavey under the imprint of the Europa Press (1935).

Beckett's prose comes from the same imaginative fount that his early poems do; the later prose is far better than the poems, but it is prose written as poems are written, conveying emotion directly to the reader. His stories and his play have the structure of poems rather than strictly narrative and dramatic forms. That is one reason out of many why audiences were first disquieted then moved by *Waiting for Godot*: they came to see a play; what they heard was something that did not imitate poetry as they knew it, but was the economical, sometimes ambiguous language of poetic imagination.

The second thing to be said is that Beckett is a comic writer of the first order, one who has an intense poetic understanding and revelation of human destiny. At the highest moments of Beckett's farcical situations, he is most serious, most revealing and in a certain sense (of which there is more to say) *religious* in his view of the human comedy. In his writings, the emotions caused by terror, pity, despair, the death-wish, and love are purged by laughter. Beckett achieves a nearly classical distinction, ancient enough, but he has renewed it in twentieth century terms, of what comedy should be; his heroes are mock-tragic heroes, "Dying Gladiators," yet never attaining respect among living creatures around them, or a desired funereal dignity. They are never completely damned or blessed. They inhabit purgatory.

In speaking of Beckett's "Dying Gladiators" I use the phrase advisedly. A gladiator's martyrdom was not that of a king-like tragic hero. The tragic fall was not his; his death was for the amusement of those who witnessed his fall in a Roman circus. However skillful, however brave he might be, whatever immortality he achieved was an anonymous one. The Gladiator was outside the orbit of Roman society, or rather he was in it only on the level of being an entertainer. The Christians saw his death as an incident in the martyrdom of man. Beckett's heroes also exist, or try to, outside the conventions of a society as complex as any in the ancient world.

BUT HOW did Beckett find such creatures, one might ask. In himself? Of course. Yet the question demands a far more objective answer. Beckett's emotional and intellectual heritage is in evidence here; it includes the peculiarities of Protestant Anglo-Irish, south Irish parentage, education at Dublin's Trinity College, Beckett's interest in the German philosophers, his position as James Joyce's secretary, his probable reading of Bergson's essay on laughter. Beckett's early surroundings, clearly shown in his first book of stories, *More Pricks Than Kicks* (1934), are of the Protestant in a Roman Catholic country, a place that is "out of the world" in one sense, and deeply heretical in another; it is a condition of exile at home. Even when the Anglo-Irishman leaves Ireland his tendency is to become more Irish than the actual Irish, to be haunted by a few drops of Irish blood in his veins. It is characteristic of him to turn to Europe, not England, as his intellectual home.

The Catholic Church in Ireland has always taken pride in being more Catholic than the Pope at Rome; its effect on the Protestant living in south Ireland is to infuse, if only by osmosis, a daily conviction of living, either well, or more frequently poorly, within the orbit of a Christian world. The Protestant position in Ireland is one fork of a three-pronged theological

Mr. Gregory is a well-known poet and critic. This is his first appearance in The Commonweal.

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agony, of which the other two are the established order of the Church at Rome and the provincial bigotry of the Irish Catholic. In Ireland the most extreme Calvinist cannot equal the passionate bigotry of the Irish Catholic; in Ireland the most sincere Atheist finds his position belittled by the sneaking conviction that he is committing blasphemy by existing at all; even he cannot escape an unheroic damnation. When Yeats wrote . . . "Because this country has a pious mind . . ." he thought of Ireland and not less of Colonus; it was also a country in which "a man can be so crossed;/ Can be so battered, badgered and destroyed/ That he's a loveless man . . ." and though Yeats was constantly forced into an heretical position, he was also forced into an admiration for Von Hügel. A gifted Protestant in south Ireland always feels the prodding of the triple-pronged fork. Even if he leaves Ireland as Beckett did (he lives in Paris and has written four novels and two plays in French), the conflicts of theological doubt and faith pursue him. His ragged soul still walks in purgatory.

In his prose Beckett has sustained the ancient, sometimes parallel, association of religion with poetry; and if at times they seem to vanish, they are just around the corner. Scratch an Irish poet, and if the scratch is deep enough to draw blood, the result, however heretical it may be, will be a religious poem.

FROM THE publication dates of Beckett's books we know that the earliest of them appeared when critical attention had been turned to writing of "social content." This partly explains why *More Pricks Than Kicks* and *Murphy,* both published in London, were ignored. The effort to read immediate "social-consciousness" into Beckett's writings is a waste of time; Beckett's concerns are with the conflicts of flesh and spirit, of mind and soul; one has to strain to read superficial political and social meanings into them. Other reasons why the books were ignored are also clear. *More Pricks Than Kicks* is a collection of stories, all Irish, which, put together, almost make a novel; they are uneven, and to their credit today, non-professional, their brilliance untarnished, the work of a "divine amateur." Among the stories, "Dante and the Lobster" and "Love and Lethe" await rediscovery; reread today they both absorb and transcend the Irish city-and-land-scapes around them. At the time of their first publication the young Beckett could be dismissed as a charming writer whose direction was unknown; today we recognize in "Love and Lethe" a better version of Graham Greene's short story, "A Drive in the Country."

It makes little difference which story was written first (I suspect Beckett's was); the point is that if one is writing about a dangerous young man who takes a girl for a drive in the country with the intention (unknown to her) of forcing her into a suicide pact, it is better to give it a comic turn as Beckett does than to make it vulgar by converting it into a slick magazine story melodrama. In Greene's story the girl escapes the clutches of the young man and leaves him to put a bullet through his silly self-destructive head, then returns home, virtue triumphant, her lesson learned, to her dear dull parents. It is very like a Hollywood script and unconvincing. In Beckett's story the girl forces Irish whisky down the foolish young man's throat (drinking half the bottle herself) until he is too drunk to aim a gun at anything, and then instructs him in the pleasures of making love. There is a comic ring of truth in Beckett's story. The mock hero who is the central figure in all the stories of *More Pricks Than Kicks,* and it is he who gives the book an air of being the first draft of a novel, is also the first of Beckett's "Dying Gladiators."

> *". . . and they drew all manner of things —everything that begins with an M—"*
> *"Why with an M?" said Alice.*
> *"Why not?" said the March Hare.*
> *Alice was silent.*
> *The Dormouse had closed its eyes by this time, and was going off into a doze; but, on being pinched by the Hatter, it woke up again with a little shriek, and went on: "— that begins with an M, such as mouse-traps, and the moon, and memory, and madness. . ."*
>
> Lewis Carroll: *Alice in Wonderland*

AFTER *More Pricks Than Kicks* Beckett's settings leave provincial Ireland unnamed; *Murphy* is a stop-off in London, South Kensington—and memorably, Kensington Gardens, a place made famous by two visitors before Beckett, J. M. Barrie and Henry James. I am aware that many readers of Beckett's writings will think first of Joyce, then Kafka; they are not wrong in doing so; Beckett has obvious debts to both, but the point is that he has taken his own direction, and on that way he is playing another tune than theirs. The direct influence of Joyce (great master that he is and will remain) has probably sterilized more young writers than reinspired them; of those who felt his dominance only a few, and Beckett is one, have had enough strength of character, and enough to say in their own right, to survive. The Beckett who holds attention is the Beckett who has absorbed the teachings of a master and has walked in a road of his own making. A primary reason why Beckett's later writings strike beneath the surface of entertainment is, of course, the emotional charge of their religious associations.

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Another reason, scarcely less important, is that Beckett's comedy has behind it certain truths of philosophic origin. Those who complain that Beckett is so "negative" in his views, should remember Nietzsche's "yeas" and "nays"—and finally that two negatives can produce an affirmative. In Beckett's *Molloy* and *Malone Dies* there are several excellent parodies on the subject of education; to the reader of German philosophy these seem to stem from Schopenhauer's remarks on education in his essay *The Art of Literature*. I quote from Schopenhauer on men of learning, a passage which may be read as a comment on Beckett's wit in his parodies on education. Murphy refuses to read books; Moran attempts to instruct his son; these scenes seem to have behind them touches of the same quality of wit that is in the following:

"The wig is the appropriate symbol of the man of learning, pure and simple. It adorns the head with a copious quantity of false hair, in lack of one's own: just as erudition means endowing it with a great mass of alien thought. This, to be sure, does not clothe the head so well and naturally, nor is it so generally useful, nor so suited for all purposes, nor so firmly rooted; nor when alien thought is used up can it be immediately replaced by more from the same source, as is the case with that which springs from soil of one's own. So we find Sterne, in his *Tristram Shandy,* boldly asserting that *an ounce of a man's own wit is worth a ton of other people's.*"

Beckett's wit is supremely his own; if at times his technic resembles Joyce's, and in some very few cases, Kafka's, his application of it is in terms of his own imagination. Consciously or not, though I suspect consciously, for Beckett's heroes carry within them a conflict between mind and body, Beckett sounds the depths of a truth concerning education; to say the least, the farcical situation he presents has intellectual tension behind it, and because Beckett is a poet, the intellectual paradox is stated in terms that evoke the emotional response of laughter.

IN THE SAME way, one of the roots of Beckett's comedy may be discovered in Bergson's essay, *Laughter,* which is a reason why Beckett's farcical situations are in impeccable taste and never descend to mere vulgarities. All the flaws in the Broadway production of *Waiting for Godot* may be traced to "slickness" of presentation, which allows for "nice-nellying" a statement, and therefore vulgarizes it. The original depth is covered over, if not lost. Small and vulgar clichés creep in, such as Bert Lahr's famous "Billy Watson's sliding-act" repeated at least once too often. Beckett's detailed parodies of clothing, his descriptions of what his heroes wear, are related, if anywhere, to Bergson's remarks in *Laughter* on dress.

"This vision of the mechanical and the living superimposed one upon the other leads us to consider a yet vaguer image, that of some sort of rigidity clamped to the mobility of life, trying ungracefully to follow life's lines and to imitate its fluidity. One can then see how easy it is for an article of clothing to become ridiculous. One can almost say that any fashion of dress has its laughable side. Only, when it is a question of current modes we are so used to the garments that we tend to accept them as an integral part of the body that they adorn. Our imagination fails to separate the two. The idea no longer occurs to us to oppose the inert rigidity of the envelope to the supple activity of the object enveloped. Here the comic element rests in a latent state. It will immediately break out when the natural incompatibility between the envelope and the enveloped will be so striking that even the traditional reconcilement will not succeed in consolidating their union: such is the case of the top hat, for example. Imagine the case of an eccentric who walks the streets in fashions of bygone days: our attention is then called to the clothing, we distinguish it completely from the wearer, we say that the wearer is *disguising* himself (as if every form of dress was not a disguise), and the laughable side of the fashion passes from the shade into the sunlight."

Beckett also follows certain Bergsonian laws for the logic of imagination as opposed to those of the conscious mind, the conscious mind, that is, of organized, mechanical and "conforming" society. Beckett strikes beneath "the logic of mind" to "a dream dreamed by the whole of society," which is why Beckett has never had the least concern for immediate political and social movements. As artist he is at an opposite extreme from those who have yielded to the fantasies of social science. Again, Bergson is relevant.

"A proposition like this one: 'my everyday clothing forms a part of my body' is absurd in the eyes of reason. Nevertheless the imagination holds it as a truth. 'A red nose is a painted nose,' 'a Negro is a white man in disguise,' yet more absurdities for the reason, but elemental truths for the simple imagination. There is thus a logic for the imagination which is not the logic of the mind, which sometimes opposes it . . . It is something like the logic of the dream, but of a dream that will not let itself be abandoned to the caprice of individual fantasy, since it is a dream dreamed by the whole of society . . . It obeys certain laws, or rather, certain customs, which are to the imagination that which logic is to the mind."

From these associations we may turn to the sleepy Dormouse's remarks on M; the Dormouse has fallen into a dream within a dream (since Alice's *Wonderland* is itself a dream) and speaks from it. The conversation took place at a "mad tea-party" which exists within the logic of imagination. The institution-sani-

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tarium scenes in *Murphy* and *Malone Dies* are at the same dream-within-dream levels. Murphy yields to the social need of taking a job, which may be equated with entering an institution—the institution is a mental hospital, and Murphy, as male-nurse, the lowest, most nearly radical position in it, encounters the castrating results of holding a job at all. He is also being prepared for death by fire, a pagan death, a loss of Christian identity. In *Malone Dies* the institution scenes blend from a dingy rooming house to dream-within-dream settings of a mental hospital cum monastery—and "why not" as the March Hare would say, why should not Beckett's "Dying Gladiator's" names begin with an M? They find themselves in places that are like ill-lighted interiors of old-fashioned cheese-cake-shaped mouse-traps, lunacy from the moon invades their quarters, they are much concerned with memory and philosophic muchness—they have come a long way from provincial Ireland, and yet certain dimmed, hilly, raining, half-pastoral melancholy images persist. *Alice in Wonderland* may not be Beckett's source for his use of M; but his use of it is as valid as the Dormouse's defense of drawing things from a well; and the most important thing drawn from a well has been truth.

BECKETT'S WRITINGS are centrifugal, not linear in movement; they are cone-shaped, very like the spiral described in Yeats' *A Vision,* and the last scenes in *Murphy* and *Malone Dies,* though they seem to be dislocated from what has gone before, are visionary "summings-up," the moments of a "showing-forth" that Joyce wrote of in *Stephen Hero.* The flying kite scene over Kensington Gardens in *Murphy* is one of the finest passages in twentieth century prose. The choice of a garden for the scene has a classical precedent in French literature which extends from *The Princess of Clèves* to *Strait Is the Gate.* Beckett has done many things at once with that scene; he has "summed-up" Murphy's impotence, since he is now unheroically dead by pagan fire, by having his mistress, a mock-widow, nurse an impotent old man flying a kite from his wheel-chair. Yet the kite for him is a nearest approach to heaven, the nearest approach to control of a visible universe. Kensington Gardens and the large sky above them may also represent nature surrounded by the most impressive of man-made things, the largest of modern cities. A half-ironic balance is struck to close an hilarious, lightly written comic novel.

In respect to the texture of their prose *Molloy* and *Malone Dies* are far more closely woven than Beckett's earlier writings; certain scenes are reworked, reenforced and given accumulative meaning. A scene in the rain is reset from "A Wet Night"—one of the less successful stories in *More Pricks Than Kicks*—in a memorable passage in *Malone Dies,* and the parodies on education through the early stories are renewed, intensified, and given in greater variation in *Murphy, Molloy* and *Malone Dies.* Though in purgatory, Beckett's heroes move toward a state of becoming; the passion, the agony of purgatory is theirs, they must still wait for the Epiphany, "the showing-forth," something beyond their trials, their errors, which cannot be named.

Malone Dies is filled with references to the Gospel of St. John, negatively said because Malone, always in a state of becoming, never achieves a place in the true light, "the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." The Epiphany at the end of *Malone Dies* is a casting off into the grey light of the sea, and the scene recalls "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Amen, Amen, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and the Holy Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God." Malone has not stepped beyond purgatory for the rebirth of his spirit, but has reached water. This passage from the Gospel of St. John also gives pertinent meaning to the first page of *Molloy*: "I am in my mother's room [the effort to enter a second time into his mother's womb]. It's I who live there now. I don't know how I got there."

The crutches, the sticks, the hats, the shoes are erroneous, ridiculous, unnatural projections of the body as Beckett's characters wear them; one guide to their origins may be found in Diderot's speculations on a blindfolded man's use of two sticks for eyes. Malone, since he lives or dies in semi-darkness, is half-blind; it is his stick that makes him sure of possessing things on earth. Molloy is dependent upon his crutches and a bicycle; that error frustrates the nature of the body; the inanimate projections deform growth. If Diderot's blindfolded man represents the life of reason, then that life in semi-darkness becomes deformed, is a kind of death. So much for the sub-strata of Beckett's mock tragic and wholly farcical situations; the point is that they stir emotions which lie beneath them. The last turn that Beckett makes concerns memory.

BECKETT'S mock heroes have defective memories —which is a deeply human, often ridiculous limitation of the mind. In *Waiting for Godot,* Gogo insists "I either forget things immediately, or I remember them forever." Truly enough, he forgets what happened yesterday or the day before, or the day before that. His memory, defective, fractional, has hold only on the fact that he *is* waiting; he remembers a continuity of waiting and becoming, a nearly instinctive process, something like (but in him translated into

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human terms) the abstract life-force, constantly becoming that which Bergson described in his *Creative Evolution*. What he is waiting for is called "Godot"; but Gogo can make an error, if only for a moment, that Pozzo is "Godot." Godot remains ambiguous and not of this earth: he is left open for the reader or audience to fill in his name. Gogo's one positive gesture out of the "Nays" that surround him is the strength to wait. Gogo and Vladimir may be regarded as two human negatives, two errors that together, as they touch hands, create the "Yes." They reject suicide; the power to wait preserves them. The other pair of friends, Pozzo and Lucky, destroy each other; they may read as destructive elements of friendship on earth, the master-slave complex of violent feeling; they ride on the stage and off; they lack the unworldly strength to wait.

No paraphrases of Beckett's writings can hope to equal the actual performance of what he says. The best one can do is realize that his prose, like poetry, has its own shades of meaning and association. Today, and at a moment when most writers have become willing to conform to whatever demands society makes upon them, Beckett stands almost alone. He too is becoming, and I strongly suspect that although he is as invisible as Godot (except in Paris) he has come to stay.

U.S. BOOKS ABROAD

Exporting America's Image

SAM HYNES

HENRY JAMES once wrote: "It is a complex fate, being an American, and one of the responsibilities it entails is fighting against a superstitious valuation of Europe." That was written eighty years ago, and James was concerned merely that Americans, in their innocence, should not be overcome by Europe. Today our fate is this much more complex: it entails fighting as well against a superstitious valuation of America by Europe, and for that matter by the entire world, and for stakes that James could not have dreamed of—the leadership of free nations.

It is both sad and ironic that in this fight to be understood, America, which has never lost a war, has yet to win a significant victory—sad because so much depends on our winning, and ironic because the desire to be understood is so strong in us as to be almost a national character trait. Americans have always wanted, above all, to be understood, and to be liked; yet they have never been able to explain their nation as well as foreigners have. The classic interpretations of America have been by foreigners—the Frenchman Tocqueville and the Englishman Bryce, and, more recently, the Swede Myrdal and the Englishman Brogan. By comparison with these, American scholarship on America has seemed narrow, or parochial, or simply dull.

In the field of imaginative literature America's failure to make itself understood has seemed even more complete, and as the desire to be understood has grown from a national compulsion to a political necessity, American writers have come more and more under criticism for their apparent failure. How, the standard argument goes, can we expect foreign readers to know what America is really like, when their knowledge of our culture is derived from *The Grapes of Wrath, Sanctuary* and *The Tropic of Cancer?* American writing has somewhat lost touch with the affirmations of American life, has abandoned our national ideals, and has gone on being pessimistic while the rest of the nation has prospered into optimism. This position has been argued widely in recent years, most intelligently by Father Bruckberger, a French Dominican, and least intelligently by *Life* magazine.

Father Bruckberger's case, which he offered last year in the New York *Times*, is simply that current American literature being read in Europe has accentuated an already distorted view of America which Frenchmen have formed, partly from their own writers (Father Bruckberger quoted anti-American sentiments from Balzac and Stendhal), and partly from our political fumblings of the last ten years. "American leadership in Europe has gone astray since the end of the war," Father Bruckberger wrote, "because of its blithe ignorance of the real feelings of Europe about America. How has American leadership manifested itself? By massive financial aid, which has only confirmed Europeans in their simplistic notion that America is the kingdom of the dollar god. And by a crushing military potential, supported first by the atom bomb and now by the hydrogen bomb, which has only confirmed Europeans in their no less simplistic notion that

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the destiny of our planet is henceforth at the mercy or the caprice of a barbarian race which possesses neither virtue nor humanity, and which lacks, besides, any sense whatever of the divine."

For Father Bruckberger the international function of American literature is clearly to provide an antidote to the distorted conception of this country now generally held abroad; for this reason he would presumably wish to see books which emphatically demonstrate the presence in Americans of virtue, humanity, and "a sense of the divine." He does not specify what these books are; perhaps they have not yet been written. Certainly his abstractions do not describe the main current of modern American writing.

THE REJOINDER to this argument, and a position which has been widely held, is that books are not ambassadors, and should be kept free from the hedgings of diplomacy, that a national literature is most vital when it is most critical, and that a book like *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* defiles America more than does *Tobacco Road*. Robert Penn Warren was arguing on this side when he wrote: "Literature is one of the voices of our national conscience, however faltering and defective that conscience may sometimes be." That conscience may not be compromised, not for the gaudiest goal; to impose a tone or a set of values upon our literature for reasons of political expediency is to corrupt what is most valuable to a free nation—its freedom to criticize itself.

One may even argue, as Robert Gorham Davis has, that art should have no relation to national well-being at all. "The question is not whether a novel does justice to its country, but to the human situation—to the climate of the soul." If one accepts this view, then there is no solution to the problem: Europeans may go on misunderstanding us because of the American books they read, but they will understand the "human situation," and this is all we should ask.

It is easy to set up these opposed views of the international function of national literature as simply a matter of the vicious vs. the virtuous: on the one hand those who wish to preserve the purity and integrity of art, and on the other those who are willing to sell it out for political advantage. Unfortunately, the case is not that simple; in a world where virtually every human action has political implications, we cannot absolve our artists from political responsibility. Yet at the same time we regard the imposing of restraint upon them as thought-control.

This conflict of attitudes has an obvious relation to the American compulsions spoken of a moment ago—the desire to be understood, and the desire to be liked. Understanding implies free access to ideas, and therefore Mr. Warren's position; liking implies a likable object, and therefore Father Bruckberger's position. Our writers seemed determined that both desires shall not be satisfied at once, and yet our perilous status in the eyes of the world demands that they shall be. If American democracy is to win the world it must be understood; if America is to dominate the world without force it must have willing friends. An American dilemma, as Gunnar Myrdal would say.

ANYONE WHO has followed our government's recent efforts at promoting understanding of our country among foreign people must be aware of the way in which we have oscillated between the horns of this national dilemma. In a few cases federal information agencies have offered the bold truth about the American scene, and some USIS libraries have stocked controversial books; but more often they have submitted to political pressures and the stridencies of 110 per cent Americanism.

The extreme in this direction was reached during Senator McCarthy's investigations of the Voice of America and the USIS; the bookburnings, the purges, the public humiliations of that dark time are vivid and degrading lessons of what can happen if we simply give in to the controllers. The opposite extreme, perhaps, is the situation now existing in France and much of Western Europe, where the predominance of American literature of a certain kind has helped to foster a view of America which is unsympathetic and untrue.

It is interesting, if not entirely edifying, to consider, in the light of this problem, our government's most intelligent attempt to do something about it—the packages of paperbound books called "An American Bookshelf," now being distributed through CARE. The idea is simply to send these inexpensive, compact libraries to institutions abroad, and thus in time to establish thousands of local American libraries at places which USIS facilities could not reach. The cost ($30 for 99 books) is covered by voluntary contributions to CARE from individuals and organizations in this country; CARE does the buying, packing and distributing, while the USIA selects the titles. Books are chosen from nine subject areas—history and political science, philosophy, biography, education and the arts, science and technology, general literature, anthologies, poetry, and fiction. The result is an impressively comprehensive list.

The Bookshelf Plan seems an entirely admirable scheme, and I think in intention it is. There is, however, one aspect of it which is unfortunate, and which points up the chief inadequacies of our information programs in general. Although the plan is privately financed and privately operated, it is controlled by a government agency. The same official censorship of ideas which has restricted USIS libraries overseas is

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imposed here; consequently, what might have been an exciting, frank exchange of ideas has been made simply another propaganda weapon.

One has only to compare CARE's publicity releases about the Bookshelf with the actual list of books to make clear a sharp and disturbing disparity between what the plan was meant to be and what in fact it is.

CARE's latest printed appeal for funds states the aims of the plan quite specifically. The Bookshelf is to "help promote understanding of America," to "answer false propaganda," and "to explain our way of life to our world neighbors." "As an American," the brochure continues, "you will be proud to send our world neighbors the Bookshelf selections. They reflect our history and politics; our philosophy and biography; our arts and sciences; yes, our sinners as well as our saints, as depicted in our literature. Here, in the democratic diversity of opinion and subject covered by our free writers, is the full picture of a free, vibrant, peace-seeking America that has nothing to fear from the truth."

FROM THIS paean we may extract these assertions: 1) the books are by Americans ("our free writers"); 2) the books are about America ("the full picture of . . ."); 3) the intention is not propaganda, but truth (elsewhere in the brochure the "enemies of democratic freedom" are blasted for their "distortions" and "slanted books"). In terms of the dilemma I set up, the Bookshelf would seem to be on the side of Mr. Warren and understanding.

The actual list, however, is another thing, in many ways incompatible with the expressed intentions of the plan. Half a dozen titles, for example, are to some degree anti-Communist propaganda (*The God That Failed, Darkness at Noon, 1984,* two books on Russia and a biography of Lenin); of these, none has any direct relation to "the full picture of a free, vibrant, peace-seeking America"; two are not even by Americans. (I don't mean to be jingoistic about this— *Darkness at Noon* and *1984* are fine books, and will doubtless be read with interest abroad; I am simply pointing out that they conflict with the expressed intentions, which seem to me the best intentions, of the Bookshelf Plan.)

Another half-dozen books, though written by Americans, have no discernible relation either to "our way of life" or to propaganda aims (for example, why is *Coming of Age in Samoa* on the list?). A scattering of other titles are neither by Americans nor about America; in addition to the fiction titles there are Schweitzer's *Out of My Life and Thought* (though perhaps he is one of the "saints" CARE mentions) and Whitehead's *Science in the Modern World.*

The last-mentioned anomalies will surely offend no one, and perhaps the presence on the list of books like *This is Russia Uncensored* will not, either. But it seems to me disingenuous, or at least confused, to offer anti-Communism as "our way of life," or to include under that rubric books totally unrelated to American society. It is this kind of small dishonesty, among other things, which has made our country intellectually suspect abroad; our desire to win friends and influence peoples has led us to advertise our national product abroad in ways that would be fair-trade violations at home.

A glance at the fiction list of the Bookshelf will reveal another weakness which is also a weakness of information policy in general: a fundamental absence of logic, or perhaps the suppression or distortion of logic in the interests of expediency and inoffensiveness. There are, I should think, two and only two rationales upon which a list of American fiction for export could be based; either the selections should be simply the best novels written by Americans, regardless of content, or they should be novels which, in sum, would add up to the most accurate possible image of American life. The difference between the two groups would be the difference between *A Farewell to Arms* and *The Time of Man*—the one a great novel by an American, only indirectly *about* America, the other a fine though slighter novel which directly reflects an aspect of American life.

Neither rationale is apparent in the current Bookshelf list. It includes no novel by Hemingway, Faulkner, Steinbeck, Fitzgerald, Dos Passos, Warren or Farrell; obviously literary merit, then, is not the standard of selection. On the other hand it does include such curious pictures of "free, vibrant, peace-seeking America" as *The Good Earth, The Bridge of San Luis Rey,* and *The Turn of the Screw;* clearly, fidelity to the American scene is not the standard, either.

IT SEEMS fairly clear that the USIA's actual criteria were something like these: no books critical of American society, or by authors known to have been

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critical; anti-Communist books wherever possible (and one must admit that the choice in this category has been good); certain obvious American classics; local color and Americana if innocuous enough (pig farmers, but not sharecroppers; *State Fair,* but not Erskine Caldwell).

In the non-literary lists (i.e. history, philosophy, science) many of the titles one would hope to find are indeed there—Tocqueville and Parkman, Emerson and Dewey, Riesman, Lincoln and Franklin, and even Dr. Spock. But one also senses omissions, not so much of particular titles as of subjects. I showed the CARE list to an economist recently back from a year in Southeast Asia, and he immediately mentioned three areas of American life of great interest to Asians, which the Bookshelf does not touch—race, religion, and economics.

There are suitable books on all of these subjects on current paperback lists; but they are controversial subjects, and at least two are the sources of considerable anti-American opinion, and so they have been avoided. The fact remains, however, that a picture of the "American way of life" which does not recognize that we have a race problem, or that we have experimented in government planning within a capitalistic system, is not a complete picture, or even an honest part of one.

It would be foolish, of course, to expect that a list of books designed to promote understanding of America abroad should include books actually hostile, or fundamentally biased toward our nation. The imbalance which Father Bruckberger regretted does exist, and it would seem to me a necessary function of the American Bookshelf to help to correct that imbalance. But in making corrections, one must maintain standards of intellectual integrity and literary value—the books one chooses must be honest books, and they must be *good* books. It may be wise to omit *Tobacco Road* on the grounds that it is a distorted image of a kind of American life, but it is not wise to substitute bland mediocrity. There is always the danger, when one corrects an imbalance, of overcompensating; and this is, I think, what the USIA has done—the present list is entirely uncritical of America, but it is also mediocre, and thus plays up to the most damning foreign judgment of us—a nation of technological greatness, but intellectual shoddiness.

TO RETURN to the dilemma which confronts us, the conflict between our desire to explain ourselves to others, and the desire that those to whom we speak should respond with affection: none of the books I have mentioned above would solve the problem, not if the whole world read them antiphonally. But they might make a start, by indicating that we, or at least some of our writers, understand ourselves. America, like all nations, is a mixture of virtues which we can display with pride, and weaknesses which we may either try to conceal, or in all humility admit.

The government's policy so far has been to conceal those weaknesses whenever possible, and this, I think, is a grave mistake. Nothing could do us more good abroad than a frank gesture of intellectual honesty, such as, for example, the wide distribution of our best books, whether entirely approving of our system or not. Out of such a gesture might come an understanding of the real America (as distinguished from the image of fatuous benevolence now being offered abroad); and out of understanding might come friendship.

America, the CARE brochure assures us, has nothing to fear from the truth. The assertion seems reasonable; it is time we tested it before the world.

THREE REFLECTIONS ON ROMEO AND JULIET

I

An honest grief
bring
    Romeo
where Juliet lies
    in her tomb

Thy leaden life
let ring
    let echo
round round
    the stone room.

II

She gave
    life to love
once
    to wait
love's waking

Who when
    to death's mien
woke
    fell instead
in love with Death.

III

Juliet had on
graveclothes when
she died
    and we
in this body sheath
    are dressed for death.

JOHN LOGAN.

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WHO'S LISTENING?

JAMES RESTON, the *Times'* cold-eyed columnist, says that American voters are a funny people: they don't listen. "Once every four years they are courted and coaxed by Presidents and would-be Presidents, by Democrats and Republicans, by commentators, reformers, socialists, teetotalers, vegetarians and prohibitionists, but they don't listen." They don't listen and then when all the talk is finished, many of them don't vote. The British, the French, the Italians, the Belgians, the Dutch, the Indians, the Japanese, the Germans, all have a higher percentage going to the polls on election day. But, says Reston, it's all right. Americans don't need to listen, they don't need to vote. "They get along. And think of the nonsense they miss every four years."

The nonsense this time got off to a running start with that dreadful keynote address by Governor Frank Clement at the Democratic convention. It continued throughout the convention as an endless procession of "great Americans" walked to the microphones and spilled out more inanity than any God-fearing people should be asked to bear. One night Senator Wayne Morse, earnest as the college professor he is, tried to talk sense, but it was clear he was boring the partisan audience. What the crowd wanted was what the "great Americans" like Governor Clement gave them: ringing denunciations of the opposition, mellow (and repetitious) tributes to the Party's heroes, shameless oversimplifications of complex issues and heady predictions of wonderful things to come after the present rascals are thrown out.

The following week the scene shifted to San Francisco. This was no improvement. Here only one "great American" mattered. The Republicans were no more interested in discussing issues or in debating alternatives than the Democrats. If there are any isolationists, McCarthyites, unreconstructed followers of Senator Taft or illiberal Republicans left, they were not at that convention, or at least they held their tongue. It was a one-note affair, and the note was "We like Ike."

The election season is no time for meaningful, conscientious political exchange. For it is simply a fact that the "democratic dialogues" Adlai Stevenson used to talk about so wistfully can not hold a crowd, especially a crowd caught up in the carnival mood of a campaign. Political issues are complex. To resolve them requires knowing precisely what is involved; this in turn requires factual study, historical perspective and some measure of political philosophy. The men we elect to high office, by and large, may be capable of sober thought between elections but during campaign periods all we ask of them is that they put on a good show.

The campaigner can judge his progress by the size and enthusiasm of the crowds he attracts. To get large, enthusiastic crowds you have to put on a lively show. You have to leave your audiences fired with ambition and good will. You are expected to leave them with the worst possible impression of the opposition and the best possible impression of yourself. If you are addressing a partisan audience—and the candidate usually is—they expect you to play shamelessly on their partisanship. This means fanning the flames of one-sidedness, flattering outrageously, accepting outrageous flattery graciously, and diverting the crowd's attention every time something comes up that might prove to be embarrassing. Your audiences are in no mood to grapple with intellectual problems. They want blacks and whites.

So it comes to this: a campaign is essentially a non-intellectual, if not anti-intellectual, enterprise. The virtues of the academy are handicaps in this marketplace. The model here is the locker-room pep talk. Partisan audiences are not interested in political enlightenment. The knowledgeable campaigner avoids a complexity as if it were the plague. The people who attend rallies want horsefeathers and hoopla. And that is what they usually get.

Four years ago Adlai Stevenson wanted to change all this. He tried desperately to debate issues, to use the campaign as a great adventure in popular political education. Stevenson has since learned; he no longer talks about "democratic dialogues." But at Yale two weeks ago he admitted he was still bothered by the fact that it seems impossible for a man to get elected to high office without first publicly demonstrating that he is unworthy of it.

The egghead candidate remains bothered. Good for him. Most politicians just relax and enjoy it. Stevenson still looks a little uneasy when he is inducted as an Indian chief or called on to judge a baking contest. Still even he would admit that he is not as nonplussed as he once was.

Americans like the big political shows that come up every four years. We wave banners and blow whistles and shout until we are hoarse. We gladly wear silly buttons and pass out handbills and ring doorbells and take up collections. We are ready to do just about anything for our man. Some of us will even go so far as to cast a vote for him. But we do draw the line: we are not willing to listen. The fledgling politician catches on to this soon enough. With just a little experience and practice he learns how to avoid saying anything worth hearing.

JOHN COGLEY.

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A Failure of Understanding

ANTHONY BAILEY

D. H. LAWRENCE has been dead twenty-six years now and we seem to be no closer to taking him in—which is partly our fault, and partly his. Certainly, in a way, we have caught up with him. But we have done this with H. G. Wells and more quickly, with Sinclair Lewis, too, and it is as much an achievement of time as it is of ourselves which makes us accept the sexual element in man as we accept Main Street: both have become clichés in literature.

In Lewis's case, this acceptance is a measure of his limited success; in Lawrence's, it is often an indication of our failure. Not that we aren't abetted in this by Lawrence himself. Robert Graves was able to write later (in *The Long Week-End*), lumping the prominent novelists of the Twenties into one category, "the most compelling fiction of the day was sex-problem fiction —whether Aldous Huxley's, Michael Arlen's, or D. H. Lawrence's." Lawrence's dogmatism made it at once easier for people to rave about him or dismiss him altogether; and when they did the latter, even half-heartedly, they could do it for reasons similar to John Galsworthy's: "It's not good enough to spend time and ink describing the penultimate sensations and physical movements of people getting into a state of rut; we all know them too well."—or else, like Graves, finding him bathetic: "He bought a cow named Susan and used to milk her with mystic devotion." It is easy to see how parts of *Sons and Lovers* could inspire Galsworthy's comment, just as a phrase such as "the queer cowy mystery of her is her changeless cowy desirableness," could set off Graves, at no time, anyway, a very tolerant man where other people's opinions are concerned. And whereas the legend a writer creates about himself is often a help in the understanding of his work (Mann or Hemingway), Lawrence got a reputation as a boor and a migratory Führer, which never did him any good at all, especially in Bloomsbury.

So in some circles he has been disregarded, and in others he has been set up as a prophet: neither of which increases his chances of being read rightly. He was one of the great innovators of the twentieth century, as much as Joyce, or Proust. He made it possible to write about the relations between man and woman, man and man, in a more entire fashion than before. Yet how few they are who have accepted this freedom, which is also a gage. It is as though we considered sex to be merely a matter of four-letter words—which was just Lawrence's point, that it isn't. "We have to be sufficiently conscious, and self-conscious, to know our own limits and to be aware of the greater urge within us and beyond us. Then we cease to be primarily interested in ourselves. Then we learn to leave ourselves alone, in all the affective centres: not to force our feelings in any way, and never to force our sex. Then we make the great onslaught on to the outside lie, the inside lie being settled. And that is freedom and the fight for freedom."

But this entirety, this consciousness of the whole man, the man alive, as he called it, is what we discountenance, reserving sex for Chapter Eight, page 432, and Saturday Night. Lawrence wished to show us that; and it was his achievement that he didn't compartmentalize sex, but integrated it fully in his work, as a dynamo, as a great deal of the inner frenzy of man. Frenzy is perhaps the right word; for we get from Lawrence what Nietzsche says we ought to get from Dionysiac art, which "wishes to convince us of the eternal delight of existence, but . . . insists that we look for this delight not in the phenomena but behind them. It makes us realize that everything that is generated must be prepared to face its painful dissolution. It forces us to gaze into the horror of individual existence, yet without being turned to stone by the vision: a metaphysical solace momentarily lifts us above the whirl of shifting phenomena. . . ."

THERE IS at once a great pain and a great vitality at work in Lawrence, and both are communicated. There is also a great tedium. So much of what he wrote continues to excite that one wonders if that word is fair. Yet it seems to describe the feeling, and I believe it accounts for much of the misunderstanding of Lawrence.

Lawrence's failure is largely one of style. Again I am aware that there are instances where no other style would do, or do so well. Parts of *Sons and Lovers, The Rainbow, Women in Love,* are as perfect as any novel in the language, and nowhere better than in capturing frustration and brief moments of peace. Yet on the whole, to my mind, Lawrence's style was unduly

Mr. Bailey, a member of the editorial staff of the *New Yorker*, is a regular contributor to this magazine.

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aggressive, repetitious, failing to assume much that could be assumed.

Anthony Beal's selection of letters, essays, and reviews seems to support this opinion.* Lawrence's wholeheartedness, like a tidal wave, swept away many of the conventional obstacles in the way of artistic expression and got very close to the ground-rock of human behavior, sometimes too close: he was inside it, and we are left out. But the wave had its minor eddies, which continue to move back and forth, in and out, an irritating action which does little to consolidate the gains made, and only annoys. Lawrence could never be satisfied with firing the big gun—which adequately handled the opposition; he had to pepper away with small-arms, which he misused and aimed badly.

It is that way with his style. For all their insights and brilliance, the later critical essays (especially those from *Studies in Classic American Literature*) finally infuriate. Even at their most sarcastic (I AM HE THAT ACHES WITH AMOROUS LOVE. Walter, leave off. You are not HE. You are just a limited Walter . . . . CHUFF! CHUFF! CHUFF!) or at their most revealing (the essay on *Moby Dick*) the final impression is of weight, heaviness. The burden of such phrases as "The Great Soul of America" and the continual "Holy Ghost" is too much. The non-conformist, hymn-liking Lawrence is always ready for revelation and the apocalypse. He never likes to be in shallow water, but in up to his neck. He lacks smoothness as he lacks wit.

These are qualities that an author can rarely do without. In Lawrence's case the lack is far outweighed by his genius, but nevertheless it does make easier a black-and-white, less rational judgment. Exasperated, one says, "Oh, this is all nonsense"—which of course it isn't; at any rate, not *all* of it, only a little of it—as in *Puritanism and the Arts*, where the English ability in landscape painting is explained thus: "It is a form of escape for them, from the actual human body they so hate and fear, and it is an outlet for their perishing aesthetic desires." Lawrence had a good enough case against English inhibition without dragging in Turner and Constable. In fact, it is often said that an artist exists by making use of his own inhibitions: Lawrence would have been nowhere without other peoples'. Only he couldn't let them alone, even when they were his friends. The Murrys had to bear with it—Katherine Mansfield and her husband—and Edward Marsh, and the others who were interested in his work. And it is like that with us: he won't let us alone, he will keep nagging.

Of course, it is in a way easier to say this now, and

*D. H. LAWRENCE: Selected Literary Criticism. Edited by Anthony Beal. Viking. $5.

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the very fact of it is a tribute to Lawrence. Like Shaw, Wells, Yeats, he kept things moving. Some of him, like Wells, seems very much old-hat today, and yet the total effect, if it can be conjured up, is of Yeats' size. The difference lies in that where the nonsense in Yeats was often in subject matter, made into art and truth by his style, the nonsense in Lawrence is less in what he is saying and more in the way he says it.

AS AN introduction to Lawrence this book would hardly serve. Diana Trilling's selection from the novels, short stories, poems, letters and criticism is much easier to take, at once more incisive and more varied in scope. But Mr. Beal has edited a fine cross-section. One misses *Christs in the Tyrol,* though that has indeed been much reprinted. A letter of 1916 to his Russian friend, S. S. Koteliansky, would have summarized much of his long-winded feelings about Dostoevsky (it is amazing how strongly Lawrence felt about Dostoevsky—one begins to suspect him of great jealousy). But one can quibble *ad infinitum* in this way. Certainly, plunging into this book, one realizes how necessary Lawrence was in the hey-day of Bloomsbury and the Georgian poets. Lacking the academic training of his contemporaries, less worshipful of the institutions and society which supported them, he was able to see through much that took them in. His essay on John Galsworthy is notable:

"While a man remains a man, a true human individual, there is at the core of him a certain innocence or naivete which defies all analysis, and which you cannot bargain with, you can only deal with it in good faith from your own corresponding innocence or naiveté. This does not mean that the human being is nothing but naive or innocent. He is Mr. Worldly Wiseman also to his own degree. But in his essential core he is naive, and money does not touch him. Money, of course, with every man living goes a long way. With the alive human being it may go as far as his penultimate feeling. But in the last naked him it does not enter." The point being that Galsworthy never gets beyond the social animal into the human individual.

In the *Study of Thomas Hardy* there are some splendid sections; the letters *are* Lawrence, forthright, spontaneous, opinionated; the essay on Thomas Mann (1913), greatly perceptive, says all most critics have said since. The essay entitled *Pornography and Obscenity* is as relevant today as it was when written, nearly thirty years ago. And all of it, as almost every word Lawrence wrote, is vital, quick, and strong, ceasing to move and persuade only when he carries himself away. Yet most often it is we who are carried away. We are forced abruptly, in the words of one of his poems, to see a fresh landscape through "the round, wild vivid eye of a wild goose staring."

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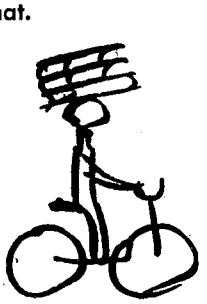

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THE STAGE

A PLAY FOR ACTORS

IN "The Loud Red Patrick," a fervent, mechanized comedy drawn from Miss Ruth McKenney's domestic remembrance of things past, the talents of Mr. Arthur Kennedy and Mr. David Wayne are displayed in a special light and relief. Mr. Kennedy, of course, is a player of intense and gritty authority, potently masculine in his vision and impact. He warrants more than the sturdy esteem which is generally accorded him; potentially, he is an actor whose inward stress and generous, troubled apprehension of life will find release only in the classical repertoire. Ironically, what gives a special savor to his art—the salty, restless, embattled American tone—may close this to him. The effect of Mr. Kennedy's art, if I may confuse two genres, has almost always seemed to me wholly moral: he is a man whose experience is narrow but deep, and personally felt; that experience, moreover, *costs*—it is involving. Hence the peculiar poignancy and stain of actuality which color the portraits in Mr. Kennedy's gallery of alienated, anguished, decent young men: his vision has securely penetrated this small but significant area of reality, and he renders it with finality in the terms of his private self.

One is never far from the private self with Mr. Kennedy. He is a distinguished specimen of the player who projects essentially not his own personality, not the wit and truth of observation, but rather an idea of life—some phantom which he struggles ever to realize in the recalcitrant matter of his flesh, and the role he has momentarily assumed. This is uncommon in our theatre (it has something to do with intelligence as well as sensibility) and I would suspect that it accounts for the imaginative pressure, the particular sincerity—even monotonous sincerity—one feels behind any of Mr. Kennedy's performances. He is able, as an artist, to dominate our state of mind; in one of his films, playing a blinded veteran, he did so by dramatizing, with almost insupportable passion and technique, the sense of privation and stress. Yet all of that pain was expressively articulated: there was difficult beauty and significance in it as well as suffering.

What Mr. Kennedy must question now, at the threshold of maturity, is the adequacy of his idea of life; he must ask if it is sufficiently ample (we know it is intense) to admit other and diverse ideas of life (which is only to say, more life). He might consider too whether an expanded technique is necessary to express this wider consciousness; Mr. Kennedy could afford to develop a certain remoteness and distance in his acting. Certainly "The Loud Red Patrick" permits him no

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such extension. He is ineffectual here because the part is merely a tissue of attitudes and externalities, all of which are alien to Mr. Kennedy's sense of life; he evades them by sliding into the conventional deceits of imitative acting and surface illusion. Once—in a speech about ignorance and light and the reach of the mind—the actor's moral sensibility is unleashed and rushes in to swell the moment richly: that, however, is the only passage of *serious* feeling the play allows.

Mr. David Wayne, alternatively, inhabits a character as it were; he pads in on cat feet, climbs dexterously into its skin, and smiles out at one with the smarmy, ferocious self-possession of a great tabby. Mr. Wayne is a specialist in eccentrics and grotesques, persons he is able to make live, for purposes of the theatre, in their oddities and palpable individuality. He is not insensible to pathos; indeed, there shimmers about him a radiance of goodness and tender affection which could not be achieved by art alone. His playing of a sponging Irish tippler in "The Loud Red Patrick" is not only a pleasure, it is a lesson in visual and aesthetic style. Mr. Wayne gives the character—really the type—a dapper, asthmatic charm; his hair, parted at the center, is glued low on the forehead. His speech is woolly; his face—wall-eyed and mottled—perpetually awry with that paralytic quiver and ludicrous *hauteur* of the drinker who would yet retain Dignity; altogether the expression is that of a bilious quince, and Mr. Wayne sustains it exquisitely, never sullying the unity of tone he has imposed on his caricature. He is an artist to his finger-tips, lithe and limber: he reminds one of what Mr. Stark Young noted in Yvette Guilbert's theatre of "sheer mental exhilaration"—her ability, by perception and expression of the moment, "to make an infectious riot in the mind and furnish a perpetual sense of quick cerebration, of epigram, of gay and easy precision."

Less is asked of Miss Peggy Maurer, though it is good to see this distinguished young actress brought finally to large public attention. Of all the rising actresses whom I have seen in the New York theatre, Miss Maurer seems to me easily the most poetic; there is about her work a translucence of spirit, a pearly luminosity and beauty; effortlessly and infallibly, she commands an overtone. Miss Maurer's pliant, yearning Irina in the production of "The Three Sisters" at the Fourth Street Theatre will be remembered as one of the loveliest and most exact Chekhovian performances within memory.

Indeed, "The Loud Red Patrick" is acted by all members of its cast with exceptional good spirits and good will. Mr. Paul Morrison's costumes are sweetly evocative. Mr. John Boruff, who adapted Miss Mc-

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Kenney's sketches, has made the familiar error of failing to realize that the theatre-life of such an entertainment as this lies in its flying vagaries of wit, not in any banally imposed "seriousness." The first act of "The Loud Red Patrick" is feverish and the third dull; the second, however, ripples with a continuous visual and verbal wit: here the director, Mr. Robert Douglas, releases the play into its proper element of charming domestic farce. (*At the Ambassador.*)

RICHARD HAYES.

THE SCREEN

LONE STAR STATE OF MIND

AS SPRAWLING as Texas itself is "Giant," George Stevens' movie based on Edna Ferber's novel about the Lone Star State. But in spite of its bigness and too lengthy running time, the film is always interesting. Stevens allows his cast to develop the characterizations slowly and carefully, so they grow in interest as the movie itself becomes more absorbing. Big Rock Hudson is properly strong and weak as the Texas rancher, Bick Benedict, who goes to Maryland to buy a stallion and returns shortly thereafter with the horse—and a wife. As this beautiful Maryland girl who has so much to learn about Texas and her husband, Elizabeth Taylor is beautiful and charming, and her portrait of a gracious and thoughtful lady is excellent. (Miss Taylor blossoms again under Stevens' direction, as she did in his version of *An American Tragedy* called "A Place in the Sun.") Bick's bride is outspoken—almost shockingly so when she calmly announces: "We really stole Texas from Mexico," strong-willed—when she insists that women should not be excluded from men's conversation about politics and business, just—in her determination to help the weak and oppressed, especially the Mexicans who are relegated to a disgraceful shanty town, and very much in love with her husband, whom she understands and learns to handle well.

In Maryland, Bick Benedict, who owns 595,000 acres, described Texas as different. Bick's wife learns how different and the meaning of bigness when she gets to her new home. The house itself (an enormous Victorian mansion that must have been copied from one of Edward Hopper's paintings) is set in the midst of a large, flat, dusty, treeless prairie; she must adjust to it, to her spinster sister-in-law (Mercedes McCambridge) who insists on bossing the house and throwing her weight around the ranch too, to her many distant though friendly neighbors (most prominent among whom are Jane Withers as a hearty ranchwoman and Chill Wills as a kindly old man who gives the newcomer good advice). But most of all, Bick's wife must learn how she can help the underprivileged Mexicans, in spite of her husband's disapproval, and be kind to Jett Rink, a young ranch hand who adores her and whom her husband dislikes with an intensity that so many unsure strong men feel toward the neurotic. James Dean portrays this off-beat, unhappy ranch hand with the same restlessness and animal magnetism he has displayed before. No doubt the way he mumbles his lines is part of the act, and a very effective part too, but I wish Director Stevens had insisted that he speak up so we could at least hear what he has to say. In his big scenes (when he refuses to sell the acres left to him by Bick's sister, later when he triumphantly announces to Bick gathered and assembled with family and friends that he struck oil, and much later when as a drunken millionaire he attempts to make a speech) Dean is first-rate.

But in spite of the good acting throughout "Giant," it is really Producer-director Stevens' pitcure. His is

Converted: One Misanthrope

Christmas Cards were not for me. I wasn't exactly a Scrooge about Christmas, mind you, but I was darned if I could see the point of sending out jolly Santa Clauses, or English coach scenes, or cute Southern colonels saying "Happy Yule, You All."

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the triumph in correlating all the departments in this enormous film and capturing this portrait of time and place. I wish he had actually named the starting date—which is probably in the early 1920's. The story spans some thirty years and covers the changes in Texas in this period—as well as the changes in the main characters, whose children grow up and have children. Although the film's tempo slows up at times, especially when Stevens works too hard or holds a scene too long in order to make his points clear to all the audience, its last half is just as engrossing as the early episodes, perhaps because it has more humor and is spread over a larger scope. Carroll Baker, Sal Mineo, Dennis Hopper, Elsa Cardenas and others add new pep to the story as the second generation; and the themes they introduce give variety to the standard Texas cattle and oil well backgrounds.

Although the script by Fred Guiol and Ivan Moffat doesn't have quite the bite or strong satire of the Ferber novel, it is very well written; and the movie has plenty in it to make Texans squirm. Again and again, gently though positively it takes a jab at the provincialism of those citizens who think that just being a Texan is next to godliness. As the story progresses, the satire gets sharper and when it comes up to the present and displays with complete whoop-de-do the grand opening of Jett Rink's airport and elaborate new hotel, it spares no feelings. Neither does "Giant" pussyfoot in condemning segregation in Texas. When Bick's young doctor son marries a Mexican medical student, the problem is forcefully brought to intolerant Bick. He meets it well; although his fist fight with the owner of a hamburger joint who refuses to serve Mexicans is viciously bloody, it wins the approval of Bick's ladylike wife who says the Benedict family, after a hundred years, is finally a real big success. Perhaps George Stevens reiterates the race questions too often at the finale, but he does make it clear that it's a big problem and will in time be solved—though hardly by the next generation as the film suggests.

Most impressive in "Giant" is the cinematography of William C. Mellor, who has caught in lovely Warner-Color the vastness of Texas. He effectively contrasts the Maryland scene with the locale in the Lone Star State, and in Texas itself he contrasts the little with the big—as in two funeral scenes, that of Bick's sister with its crowds of drinking people, and much later that of his Mexican chauffeur's son, who dies in World War II and is buried with dignity and honors in the small Mexican cemetery. As a whole, "Giant" is a forceful film and, while it may have been more forceful had it been shorter, it is still a magnificent recreation of a way of life in America.

PHILIP T. HARTUNG.

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Years of Tragic Seriousness and Idyllic Innocence

THE FLOWERS OF THE FOREST. By David Garnett. Harcourt Brace. $4.50

BY ANNE FREMANTLE

THE INNOCENT prattle of "Bunny" Garnett is so enjoyable that it is easy to miss the consummate art with which the author of *Lady Into Fox* has written every line of this second volume of his autobiography. It covers the years of World War I—he was twenty-two in 1914—and ends with the birth of his son and the publication of his best-seller (over 500,000 sold). Although he did not experience the war at first hand, and curiously few of his own personal friends were killed in it, yet it hangs like a pall of sanguinary smog over the gifted, gay and good-natured company vividly portrayed in this enchanting book, and provides its somber title. Mr. Garnett has an extraordinary gift for conveying the golden quality of English life in those years, although it was shot through with the anguish and horror of what was occurring twenty-one miles away.

"Money no object" might have been the motto of the gallant company of writers and artists among whom David Garnett found himself. No one had any; the tiny sums needed to live seem fantastic even to mention, now. For example, after David Garnett had been "had up" as a conscientious objector, he was allowed to work as a farm laborer instead of going to prison (as did many of his glorious contemporaries, among them Earl Russell, Lord Noel-Buxton, Clifford Allen, Ramsay MacDonald, etc.), and he was paid twelve shillings and sixpence ($2.50) a week for an eleven hour day. Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant let him live with them "for free"; in return, he worked in their garden, pruned their orchard and took care of their bees in his spare time.

When Maynard Keynes went to Paris after the German breakthrough in 1917, to buy pictures from the Degas sale, he bought for under £500 a Cezanne still life, a small Delacroix painting, a drawing by Ingres, and several large charcoal drawings by Degas. "Prices at the sale had been low as the Germans were shelling Paris with a long-range gun," explains Mr. Garnett. What agreeable lives these artists all led, living in lovely country mills and cottages (much more comfortable and less draughty than stately homes) and, in London, giving charming parties, at which—believe it or not—*cocoa* was often drunk. And on this Virginia Woolf, Maynard Keynes and his wife Lopokova, Lytton Strachey; D. H. and Frieda Lawrence, Marc Gertler and Duncan Grant all had a delightful time, doing charades, reading aloud, or, sometimes going quite wild with high spirits and sliding down the South Downs in the snow on tea trays, or jumping into box hedges.

The tragic seriousness of what was occurring on the Continent contrasts brilliantly with this idyllic innocence. Mr. Garnett volunteered to work with the Quakers in France, and was shipped out to Sommeilles, in the wake of its devastation by the Germans. This was wooded country where in winter the farmers met several times a month to hunt wild boar, where foxes were shot to protect the poultry. There was a village miser, and a village drunk. Most of the hundred and forty houses were inhabited by well-to-do farmers. That is, until after the battle of the Marne and the retreat from Ste. Menhould, when the German army advanced. Then the mayor was shot, and so were all the cattle; the "houses, outhouses, cattlesheds, everything was burned. Every plough, every reaper and binder, every mowing machine was set on fire. Rabbits in their hutches, chickens in their coops." Two hours after the Germans had entered the village, there were only six houses left. And fewer male inhabitants. Yet Mr. Garnett enjoyed life in this shattered French village, learning to be an expert roofer and tiler, distributing what food the Quakers had to give, and sharing the village gossip.

He comments wryly on the difference between the French view of war and the English—no mawkishness about "our dear boys" or glory; no dislike of "conshies" or any feeling they were shirking. Just utter horror and hatred for war and all its works, and a cynical lack of hope for any better future. Which may be a clue to the difference between the English and the French intellectual life. Here, in this witty, sensitive record, the English intellectual and artist is well and truly shown, and at his best. Why is it so different, so worlds apart from, say, the de Goncourts' Journal or Mlle. de Beauvoir's *Mandarins*? Partly, perhaps, because the English don't take the arts seriously: Maynard Keynes stands out in this book like a visitor from another planet: he belonged to the grown-up world of politics; his brief-case was stuffed with State Papers, not sketches. Artists for the English, as for Karl Marx, are marginal to society, unpolitical animals, or beasts or Gods (kittle-cattle, Marx called them). Whereas, for the French, the fact that a man is a great poet is good reason to appoint him ambassador, for the English it would be a reason not to. In France, a writer or a painter can be shot for his *political* views; in England such deference would be unthinkable.

Mr. Garnett is able to be very, very funny about his friends without ever saying a single mean thing: one can laugh *with* him at Lady Ottaline's eccentricities or at Augustine Birrell's bad manners, without envy, hatred or malice. And some of the details are sheer joy: Lady Rothermere's very heavy gold salt cellars and the stone fruits that so well epitomized Gilbert Cannan and Mary Barrie's marriage; the small mouse that Duncan Grant drew shyly out of his blouse after he and Garnett had been in a mouse-killing battle; Vanessa's children ducking the unwanted governess and saving their mother the bother of sacking her; the extraordinary scene where D. H. Lawrence lectured Duncan

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Grant on art, and his letters of detestation of poor Frankie Birrell; Edward Garnett's shy farewell gift to his son going to work for the Friends: a corkscrew.

Unlike a great American autobiographer, Henry Adams, who was, even as a youth, astonished that what he considered the second greatest instinct in man, the *religious*, had so atrophied among his contemporaries, Mr. Garnett seems to have gone serenely through life unaware of any possible relationship between Creator and created. It is a great pity and a cause for amazement when a person so appreciative of beauty should never have wanted to "Give beauty back, back to God/ beauty's self and beauty's giver."

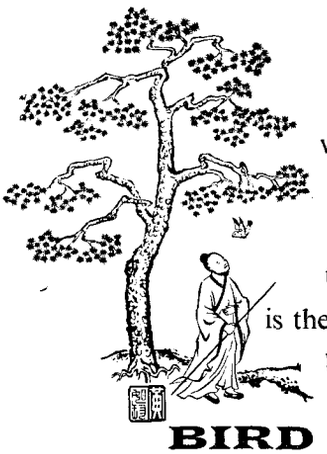
Imprisoned Voice

IN SILENCE I SPEAK. By George N. Shuster. Farrar, Straus. $4.50.

By J. N. MOODY

THE TITLE of this book was validated when the British actor Alec Guinness announced recently his conversion to Catholicism as a result of his movie role based on the trial of Cardinal Mindszenty. The volume's substance proves that the celebrated prisoner still speaks to millions of his countrymen from the tomb where he has been interred alive. Its purpose is to make certain that he will still speak to us of the West, reminding us of the harsh realities of Soviet rule despite modifications in its foreign policy.

The imprisoned Cardinal is fortunate that his spokesman is the distinguished president of Hunter College, who has demonstrated his understanding of various brands of totalitarianism in previous volumes. Dr. Shuster has carefully gathered material from various escapees, and has used the printed sources, such as the address of the Cardinal's major opponent, Rakosi, at the Academy of the Hungarian Workers Party in Budapest (February 22, 1952). This speech, which took three hours to deliver, is the frankest appraisal ever written of the Com-



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munist methodolgy in the seizure of power by one of its most adept practitioners. It is the conflict between Rakosi, the son of a poor shopkeeper, and the Cardinal, born in a small peasant's family, that sharpens the issues involved in the Communist attack upon the Church.

The outlines of the Mindszenty story are familiar. This volume adds some details and stresses its significance. The Cardinal, who had been a prisoner of the Nazis, was aware of what his arrest by the Communist Party involved. He managed to give a note to a friend, written on the back of an envelope, which contained these words: "I have taken no part in any conspiracy of any kind. I shall not resign from my Episcopal See. I shall not make a confession. But if despite what I now say you should read that I have confessed or resigned, and even see it authenticated by my signature, bear in mind that it will have been only the result of human frailty. In advance I declare all such actions null and void." Forty days after he had penned these lines, the Cardinal's resistance was broken and he was condemned by the use of forged documents, with the sentence pronounced by a judge who had performed the same tasks for the Nazis.

Mindszenty had not enjoyed the universal esteem of his clergy because of his lowly birth, his reserved nature, and his limited education. His great asset was his capacity to speak to his people with robust eloquence. Unlike some of his fellow-Bishops, he had determined from the beginning not to conciliate the dominant Communists. The crisis came with his proclamation of the Marian Year in 1948 and the great outpouring of Hungarians which followed. The repression was draconic, and one of the victims was the Cardinal.

There is a great problem beneath the lines of this tragic story. Would it have been wiser to have been more cautious and to refrain from arousing the fury of the Party which was in complete control of the country? Is defiance the best course in the face of overwhelming power, then wielded by Stalin, whose crimes are now a matter of Communist record? These are serious questions on which sincere men in Hungary were not in accord. Implicitly, this book justifies the choice of the Cardinal, for conformity did nothing to help the nameless thousands broken by Terror. And the choice was more emphatic since the Cardinal did not flinch from drinking the same cup as did the most humble layman.

Clown and Genius

WITH LOVE FROM GRACIE; SINCLAIR LEWIS: 1912-1925. By Grace Hegger Lewis. Harcourt Brace. $5.75.

By WILLIAM JAMES SMITH

SINCLAIR LEWIS had published five novels before *Main Street* appeared in 1920 and made him world famous as a satirist of the American scene. *Babbitt* clinched this reputation two years later and perpetuated the curious illusion, which has never been dissipated, that America had produced its first great satirist. Lewis may have been a great novelist, despite the neglect into which his reputation has currently fallen, but satire was never his creative bent. Whether Lewis was taken in by his own reputation or not is hard to say, but it is probable that he was somewhat puzzled by it.

Satire requires a quality of intellectual anger which was completely alien to Lewis, who was a man of a completely kindly, though somewhat unpredictable, disposition. His bitterness at the mores of Main Street was more a passing chagrin than a philosophical stand and his attitude toward Babbitt was not a condemnation of petit bourgeois morality. George F. Babbitt was a pathetic man, not a vicious one. In 1938, when Lewis published *The Prodigal Parents,* there were great cries of indignation that Lewis had sold out to middle-class fatuity. Fatuous or not, Lewis had never been more than a week-end critic of the middle class. Like all writers of his time, he toyed with progressive social thought; he long and seriously contemplated a sociologi-

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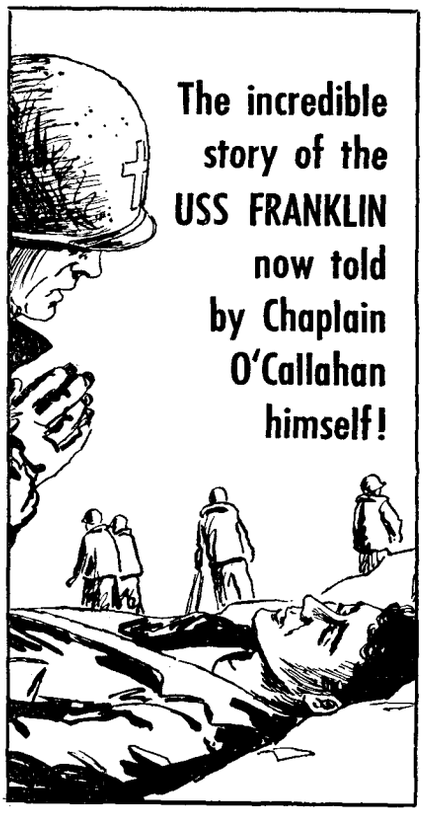
cal novel idealizing the career of a labor leader, having Eugene Debs in mind as his hero, but his personal encounters with Debs and with the labor movement in action left him with only a shrug of contempt for the ignorance of the working man.

Lewis published more than twenty novels in his thirty-five year career. The three for which he will be best remembered (*Main Street, Babbitt,* and *Arrowsmith*) all appeared in a brief few years in the early 1920's. During this period he was married to Grace Hegger Lewis, who points out the coincidence in her volume of reminiscence *With Love From Gracie.* Mrs. Lewis, who served as an affectionate model for Carol Kennicott in *Main Street,* was fortunately possessed of "instinctive good literary taste," as she tells us in her book, and it was she who suggested that Carol have a Japanese brocade hanging on her living room wall. Miss Hegger was working on *Vogue* when "Hal" first accosted her gallantly in a freight elevator. He looked like Charlie Chaplin to her and she looked like a Lady to him. Neither of them recovered completely from that first impression. Hal wrote doggerel verse to Lady Grace and Lady Grace accepted his attentions with amusement, marrying him when his first novel was published. Thereafter Hal's verses to Lady Grace ceased, and Lewis's Chaplinesque side proved less amusing in constant proximity. The fault was not entirely on Lady Grace's side, as Mrs. Lewis tells us candidly. And undoubtedly Lewis's peripatetic compulsion must have been a trial, and his rapidly increasing addiction to drink an even greater one.

Lewis, by common account, was in many ways a childish person all his life, petulant and self-willed and unfulfilled for all his undoubted talent. It is always a mysterious and gratifying thing how a talent can rise above personality. And Lewis's did. It is early yet for a reappraisal of just how great that talent was. Among his friends Lewis was famous, and a little dreaded, for his inexhaustible ability as a mimic. *The Man Who Knew Coolidge* is



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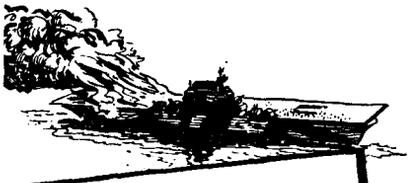

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appalling literary evidence of this facility. *Babbitt* is a vastly superior evidence of the same facility, essentially of a photographic, a documentary, nature. *Arrowsmith* and *Elmer Gantry* further attest to this painstakingly documentary impulse. Documentation alone, however, does not make great novels. It is no accident that H. G. Wells and Arnold Bennett were Lewis's literary heroes; and he completely shared their journalistic gestalt. His few memorable characters come alive not so much through any inner vitality but through being so meticulously "reported." Lewis's supply of human drama is negligible —which is strange in a man so desperately interested in the theater. Rather, he examines a social situation or gives the "inside" story of a profession—preacher, businessman, social worker, hotel keeper. As a result much of his work (*Work of Art, Ann Vickers*) is ephemeral, and even the best threatens to decline into the region of the "historically interesting."

Mrs. Lewis's memories of her famous husband, though complacent, are not unkindly. In her book she emerges much more clearly as a personality than Lewis does. It is probable that she never understood the odd combination of clown and genius she was married to, but she failed only after a spirited attempt. Their parting seems to have been more in fatigue than rancor. Her stroll down Main Street provides a fascinating glimpse of one of the brightest and saddest of American literary figures.

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feeling for poetry, and, what is considerably worse from my point of view, he also had little feeling for prose; his writing at its best never rises to the level of Stendhal's or Tolstoy's, which is Continental prose without benefit of poetry. Yet I think Trollope was as great a novelist as either, and a far greater novelist than Hardy."

Of Henry James: "The arrangements [of a James novel] are impeccable and vigorous, but at times they resemble those of a magpie of genius rather than an artist."

Of Literature: "Literature is forever swinging between Northanger Abbey and Mansfield Park. Neither can ever die. Northanger Abbey is in all of us from our earliest dreams of pleasure and power; the Gothick castles are not in history, but in our imaginations."

These selections are sufficient to show that Mr. O'Connor can be fresh and original without being eccentric or strained. They may also indicate that he thinks the boundaries of the novel are imposed by a time and a class, rather than by geography, that mid-nineteenth century novels of England and Russia have more in common than English novels that are separated by a century. For Mr. O'Connor the novel is the art form of the middle class of the nineteenth century. What preceded was some variety of the romance; what followed has yet to be defined. The novel, thus, is drawn from limited material. It is domestic and civic, concentrating on society and the place of the individual, on classes, professions and trades. The treatment of this material is realistic and prosaic.

With these standards Mr. O'Connor sets to work to examine the particular novel, of course, but also the relation between author and novel, audience and novel, and all three—author, novel and audience—in relation to the greater society of which they are a part. The principal tools of his examination are sets of polar opposites, "judgment" and "instinct," and "objective" and "subjective." Though these tools seem quite limited, they are, in Mr. O'Connor's hands, quite serviceable.

Mr. O'Connor persuades us, for

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example, that certain characteristics which persist throughout Jane Austen's work are accounted for by the consistent check which she imposed upon her imagination. He writes convincingly of Dickens' relation to his public, pronouncing it an unseemly affair and its results as often damaging. As the century advanced the form of the novel changed; it tended to become poetic rather than realistic, subjective rather than objective. It tended, in fact, to become something other than itself. It ceased to be "a mirror in the roadway," faithfully reflecting the realities of the passing scene. For the author tended to approach nearer the mirror until finally he entered it and it gave forth, not an objective reflection, but the author's subjective reaction. The novel, according to Mr. O'Connor's tenets, had ceased to be.

Mr. O'Connor includes giants in his brief book. Jane Austen, Dostoevsky, Balzac, Gogol, D. H. Lawrence and Joyce come within his purview. This book deserves to stand with those few which add to our knowledge of the novel. One flaw it shares with the others. Mr. O'Connor criticizes previous definitions of the novel as an art form. But he nowhere offers one himself. He tells us what conditions produced it and what changes time has wrought upon it. But his major point —that it has almost disappeared— fails to convince. For he has described a genre, not defined a form. We grant that what we know as a novel today is not what the nineteenth century knew. That it has ceased to transform itself is yet to be proved.

REVIEWERS

Anne Fremantle, a contributing editor of The Commonweal, is the editor of *The Age of Belief* and the recently published *The Papal Encyclicals in Their Historical Context.*

Father J. N. Moody, of the faculty of Notre Dame College, Staten Island, and a regular contributor to this magazine, edited *Church and Society.*

William James Smith, a frequent contributor to The Commonweal, is on the staff of the *Atomic Industrial Forum.*

James Finn is an associate editor of The Commonweal.

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